



**U.S. Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Western District of Texas**

Johnny Sutton, U.S. Attorney

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Shana Jones, Special Assistant
Daryl Fields, Public Information Officer
(210) 384-7452

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MORALES AND TEXAS SYNDICATE PROSECUTION TEAMS HONORED

United States Attorney Johnny Sutton announced that The Department of Justice held its 21st annual Executive Office for United States Attorneys Director's Awards Ceremony today in which 224 award recipients received recognition for their excellence in law enforcement. Recipients include Assistant United States Attorneys, litigation and information technology support personnel, as well as others who have made outstanding contributions in federal, state, and local law enforcement.

"I commend all of the award recipients for their extraordinary accomplishments," said Attorney General John Ashcroft. "Your work, your lives, and your actions have changed lives for the better, ensuring that every American is equal under the law and protected by the United States Constitution."

"Today's awards are well deserved recognition for the great work of these talented prosecutors. Both were extremely important cases - one involved the prosecution of a corrupt statewide public official and the other the dismantling of a murderous prison gang," stated U.S. Attorney Johnny Sutton.

In the Western District of Texas, those honored included Assistant United States Attorneys, Sharon Pierce, Jim Blakenship, and John Phinizy and FBI Agent Robert Hightower for their work on the Dan Morales prosecution. In October 2003, Morales, the former Attorney General of Texas, was sentenced to four years in federal prison for filing a fraudulent 1998 Income Tax Return and attempting to secure unearned attorney fees related to the financial settlement in the case of *The State of Texas v. The American Tobacco Company, et. al.*

Also honored were Ron Sievert and Liz Cottingham for their prosecution of the Texas Syndicate (TS) on racketeering and drug charges. Testimony during the 8-day trial revealed that from the mid 1990's to 2003, members of TS were involved in a racketeering criminal enterprise involving murder, the distribution of illegal narcotics, extortion, counterfeiting and armed robbery. Several defendants received life sentences in this case.

The Executive Office for United States Attorneys provides oversight, general executive assistance and direction to the 94 United States Attorneys' Offices around the country.

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